

PECK AND HIS BOY

Hawthorne Interviews the Author of Peck's Bad Boy.

JOKES PLAYED BY DOUBLES.

How He Became Governor of Wisconsin—One of the Governor's Sons the Boy—Governor Peck's Doubles.

In the early part of this decade, a series of articles began to appear in a western newspaper, entitled "Peck's Bad Boy"—or, at any rate, it was by that name that they were spoken of. They were about a certain boy, and they were written by a man named Peck, who was the editor of the paper. The boy was a type; the kind of boy who is full of vitality and overcharged with a boy's sense of humor and fun, which he expresses by that of practical jokes. The interior of the boy, and his more or less involuntary playmate, victim or fellow conspirator, as the case might be, was a grocer, the owner of the corner store in the country town of which the boy was a native. The father and mother of the boy were good, commonplace American people, with ordinary little human frailties and capacities, of which their offspring, with a look of reverence somewhat passing the average even of American youth, failed not to take advantage. The boy certainly made things very lively in that western town, not only for his parents, for the grocer and for the inhabitants generally, but also for himself. The humor of his inexhaustible pranks won the heart and tickled the risibilities of the great American people. A weekly record of his adventures was copied in newspapers all over the country, and when they were collected in book form, everybody bought a copy of them and chuckled over them anew. There is probably no other volume in our literature which provokes more and more irresistible laughter to the linear inch than does the book of the adventures of Peck's Bad Boy. There are three other books analogous to this which will at once recall themselves to the memory: "Being a Boy," by Charles Dudley Warner; the "Story of a Bad Boy," by J. B. Aldrich; and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," by Mark Twain. Each of these is excellent; but I doubt whether all of them together have had



C. S. Spang

As many readers as "Peck's Bad Boy." The future historian of the human nature of the nineteenth century must take account of it; and he may set it off against the enforced decorum and submissiveness of the Puritan boys of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including George Washington; and reconcile the contrast according to the laws of heredity and evolution—if he can.

When, a short time ago, it became known that the author of Peck's Bad Boy had been chosen governor of the state of Wisconsin, it is probable that a good many people felt surprised. Certain upright and conscientious authors here and there may have declared their astonishment by glowing comments upon the condition and prospects of a literary career which permitted the perpetrator of such a volume to hold one of the most honorable and responsible offices accessible to American citizens. "What the man who concocted that piece of vulgar absurdity! To put him on a civic level with Lowell, Motley and Irving? Our literature is going to the dogs—not to speak of the comedy!" And they would say, what was the use of writing beautiful poetry and elevated fiction, if the perpetrator of such subject rubbish was to get the reward?

Now, none pretends that the book in question has not got plenty of good healthy vulgarity in it, or that its humor is not of an obvious and boisterous quality. But then, there is a great deal of vulgarity in the American people, and a widespread fondness for coarse practical joking. And the book is popular because it reflects what we are and describes what we do—or would like to do, did opportunity and resources admit. Peck's boy, whatever else he is or is not, is an American, and Americans wish to be told about themselves, especially if they can laugh at the narrative.

As all events, I improved the chance which time and place afforded me to make a personal investigation into the matter. Chicago, though rather far from the Hub of the Universe, is a central spot, with sixteen lines of railway converging on it and first at present, owing to causes unnecessary to enumerate, it contains, in addition to its proper quota of inhabitants, liberal contingents of citizens from all over the country. Moreover, Madison, the capital of Wisconsin, is less than one hundred miles away, and Milwaukee is no further, and in those two cities Peck lives—officially in the first, and domestically in the other. Finally, the governor, like everybody else, is interested in the fair, and in its every work. There is a Wisconsin state building in the fair, the arrangements of which are under the governor's supervision; and it is there that on certain days he is to be seen. When I wrote to inform him of my designs upon him, he responded as follows:

"My Dear Sir: I have received your letter, in which you state that you hoped to lunch with Eugene Field and myself on a certain occasion in Chicago. I am very sorry that I was not permitted to display to you the wild western appetite which I possess, and to become acquainted with you. I expect to be in Chicago on Saturday of this week, and I may remain over Sunday. You say that you want a story out of me—something about how I became governor. I do not know that I could furnish anything that would be



WISCONSIN BUILDING—WORLD'S FAIR.

of interest to the public. I hardly know myself how I became governor. It was one of those things that happen sometimes, and which are liable not to happen again. However, if I get an opportunity to talk to you I may be able to tell you what little I know in a couple of minutes. Yours very truly, George W. Peck."

This communication came to hand on the Saturday morning specified, and I lost no time in putting on my hat and walking over to the fair grounds. It was a fine warm day, and thousands of people were scattered about everywhere, and the pretty Wisconsin building was full of (I presume) Wisconsin people; the broad veranda which surrounds it was crowded, and the handsome hall and rooms were full. This edifice, unlike many of the state buildings, contains no exhibit of anything pertaining to the state except its taste and its comfort; and the result is one of the most attractive mansions on the grounds.

As I did not know the governor by sight I had recourse to a young gentleman writing at a table upstairs. Was the governor in? Yes, he was; he had been in all morning. Would the young gentleman kindly convey my card to him? Yes, he would, if I would wait a little. I waited, and in a few minutes I beheld my friend approaching, and beside him a man of middle age, with an alert, capable look, whom I divined to be the personage of whom I was in search. Physically he is a compact, brisk figure of about five feet eight, with good shoulders, well-formed hands and feet, a short neck, a ruddy visage, short gray hair, thinning away from the forehead, and a white mustache and imperial. His head, without being larger than the average, is well-balanced and capacious; the forehead denotes quick observation and humor, and the rather full setting of the eyes and the twinkle that abides in them spoke of love of fun and readiness of speech. Were I restricted to two words to describe him, I should say he was clever and jolly. Not being so confined, I will add that his features indicate good judgment, spontaneous insight into men and things, a quick temper, modified by innate kindness and by knowledge of the world and of human nature; a faculty of synthesis, of seeing things in the mass, and a certain impatience of mere detail.

Although I could not question the truth of the governor's assertion that he could tell me "all he knew in two minutes," I am distrustful of my own capacity to assimilate so much information in so short a time. But, after all, the mystery of the governorship was less abstruse, when you came right down to it, than it appeared at a distance.

"If I had known," Mr. Peck observed, in response to my solicitation, "that writing that book would have made me governor, I wouldn't have



MILWAUKEE MILLIGAN, PECK'S DOUBLE.

written it. But the idea didn't happen to occur to me."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it was not entirely the book that did it."

"Well," said he, "it was a first-rate advertisement, no doubt about that. I guess a good many people saw those articles. When I first began writing them, I didn't know they would turn out the way they did. It was just a notion that I thought I would fill a column or two, and I started in on it. After awhile I found the papers were copying them. The ones that weren't copying them were abusing them, which was just as good for me, and perhaps better. So I kept along."

I insisted that there was, nevertheless, no apparent logical connection between the book and the governorship.

"Well, you see I'm pretty well known where I live," quoth Mr. Peck. "I've lived there about all my life, though I was born in Jefferson county, N. Y., and I had a paper over in Kansas before I started Peck's Boy. But the people round in Wisconsin got to know me pretty well outside of the book, and I guess that may have had something to do with it."

"And so you are a Jefferson county man?"

"They say all the statesmen come from Jefferson county," rejoined the governor, with a chuckle. "I was born there, anyhow; but I got out here pretty young."

It had occurred to me that possibly Peck's Bad Boy was a reminiscence of the distinguished author's own childhood; but when I gave an intimation of my conjecture, he shifted the responsibility.

"I've got two boys," he said, "and either of them might have been the boy. One of them is married, and has

a child eight years old."

"You must have begun family life pretty early," I remarked, glancing at his fresh and ruddy face.

"I'm fifty-two," he replied. "I made a rapid mental calculation. Say the boy was twenty-one when he married. Twenty-one and nine are thirty. Thirty from fifty-two leaves twenty-two. Supposing the boy to have been the eldest son of the governor's children, he could not have been more than twenty when he married. It was manifest, at all events, that marriage, in this case, had not been a failure. He bore about him every sign of being a fortunate man, in domestic as well as in public affairs."

"I used to hang about a corner grocery store when I was a boy," said I. "Whether your boy is a portrait or not, I am prepared to maintain that your grocer is."

The governor laughed. "Well, I shouldn't wonder if he might be," said he. "I guess the corner grocery man is pretty well known everywhere."

You yourself would make a tolerable likeness of a friend of mine—Joe Howard, the journalist," I remarked.

"I know Joe well," he answered. "Yes, we do look a good deal alike. The side of the face"—passing his hand over his cheek—"there's a resemblance there. When we are around in the same place a good many people get puzzled. We were at a hotel here in Chicago the other day. A man I'd never seen before came up to me and slapped me on the back and asked me whether I'd take anything. I said yes. I will. He asked me what I should be. I said I'd have a glass of beer—I was a beer man. He looked surprised, and wanted to know if we hadn't better make it a bottle of wine. I told him: 'Oh, no; I'd never cultivated a taste for champagne yet, and I couldn't afford to now.' He stared at me and said: 'You tell me you don't drink champagne, and you're Joe Howard?'" My name isn't Joe Howard," I said. He asked me what my name was and I told him. He paid for the beer, added the governor, with a twinkle in his eye, "and when it comes to people taking Joe for me, and offering to treat him to beer, it goes the other way."

"A double is not always a convenient thing to have going about," said I.

"There's another fellow that looks like me over in Milwaukee," the governor rejoined. "He's a lawyer by the name of Milligan, and he has a sense of humor. He made it interesting for me the time I was running for governor. A fellow met him on a horse car and said to him: 'Well, what are your chances? How is your canvass getting on?' 'Oh, Milligan said, 'I don't know. I guess it's no use. I give it up.' 'Is it as bad as that?' the other man said. 'Yes, sir; nothing would surprise me more than to be elected.' A few days later the same man met me and said: 'Well, Peck, so it isn't going to be any use, eh?' 'What isn't?' said I. 'Why, no chance of your election.' 'I don't know about that,' said I. 'It's the first I've heard of it. I've been expecting to get there all along by a good majority.' 'You do?' said he; 'then what did you tell me you gave it up for, the other day?' 'I never told you nor anybody else any such thing,' said I. 'And I haven't seen you for over a month, either.' 'What! didn't I meet you in the horse car day before yesterday, and you told me it was no use?' 'No, sir, no such conversation ever took place between me and any man.' 'Do you mean to tell me it wasn't George Peck I was talking to?' 'It does look that way,' I said. Another trick that Milligan would play on me was to be odious and curt to people I knew—not insultingly to them. A man would come up to him and hold out his hand and say: 'Well, old man, how are you?' Glad to see you? Milligan would look at him and put his hand behind his back and say: 'I don't know you, sir, and I don't shake hands with everybody. I don't want everybody coming up and speaking to me.' The man would go off, feeling insulted. The next day, perhaps, he would meet me, and I would be cordial, and go up to speak to him. He would say: 'Oh, so you've got over your sniffs, have you?' 'When was I sulky?' I would say. 'Why, yesterday; and as good as insulted me.' 'I didn't see you yesterday.' 'Well, I had some trouble proving it to him; and afterwards I would see Milligan and say to him: 'Here, you are carrying this joke too far.' He would laugh, but of course he would make it all right with the man later."

So it appears that practical jokes can be played even on so prolific a deviser of them as the author of Peck's Bad Boy. The whirligig of time brings about his vengeance; and it might even happen that Gov. Peck might be made the victim of a prank derived from his own too popular volume.

"Come and see me at Milwaukee," said the governor, shaking my hand as I bade him good-by. "It's only a two hours' ride from here, and we think it's a very pretty city."

JULIAN HARTHOISE.

Cost of Training a Father.

A few years ago there was much criticism because so much money was spent in educating cadets at the Annapolis naval academy. It also costs a good deal in other countries to educate officers for the navy, especially for the British navy. A complaint was published in one of the London papers a few days ago, because each cadet costs about \$300 a year. On the training ship Hibernia at Dartmouth there are 248 cadets, with a staff of 102 instructors, and it costs about \$200,000 a year to maintain them. Of this amount the parents and guardians pay to the government about \$65,000 a year. The royal naval college at Greenwich is said to be another quicksand for the public money. It costs \$200,000 a year to keep it running, and according to the average attendance each officer there instructs costs the country about \$1,550 a year.

The Fish Industry in China.

The waters of China abound in fish, and it is estimated by high authority that one-tenth of the people of that empire derive their food from the water. The coasts are crowded with enterprising and industrious fishermen, and beside the net and hook a great number of ingenious expedients are used to capture the fish. In the eastern provinces carpenter are trained in great numbers to catch fish, which they bring to their master, who sits in a boat from which he watches at the same time fifteen or twenty of the birds.

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